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1938

MARTHA G. FLETCHER

Dearest Mrs. Roosevelt:

Your letter made me very happy. It was a kind of de coeur avec vous, and what you say about the Neutrality Act is what, for a year seeing it work one-sidedly in Spain, we have <sup>all</sup> <sup>here</sup> thought. Yesterday, the papers say, the Act was coming up for revision and we do not yet know what happened. We are asked by everyone and we ask each other, and we wait for the news. Right now, the Neutrality Act is of the greatest importance. Because the fight is far from lost here, but material is sadly needed. The much bragged of Italian advance to the sea was done with planes and artillery, against brave men who were inadequately armed. Whole ~~xxx~~ divisions (amongst them the American Brigade) were surrounded and cut off, and fought their way through the Fascists, back to Government territory, reformed their lines and fought again, again to be surrounded, again to fight their way through and reform. The military history of the period of the war since Gandessa, on April 2, is a story of men overwhelmed by planes and guns, who never saw enemy infantry, but who have somehow managed now (April 24) to reform and reorganize their lines and calmly, serenely and determinedly carry on. There has been neither panic nor disorder, neither in the rear -- Barcelona -- nor at the front. A retreat before <sup>heavy</sup> impossible armaments was carried out with order, and the line now holds. Even the refugees -- and they leave home often with a small bundle wrapped in a handkerchief, abandoning everything to get out, -- are quiet and patient on the ~~xxx~~ roads, neither hysterical nor dramatic, but only determined not to live where the Fascists rule.

Just before the Fascists reached the sea, I was out on the road and watched for <sup>5</sup> fifty minutes twelve black German planes, flying in a perfect circle, not varying their position, flying and bombing and diving to machine gun: and they were working on one company of Government soldiers, who had no planes or anti-aircraft to protect them but who were standing there, holding up the advance so as to permit an orderly retreat. That same day we watched thirty three silver Italian bombers fly in wedges over the mountains across the hot clear sky to bomb Tortosa: and anywhere and everywhere is proof of the huge amount of new material sent in for this drive, and everywhere is proof of the unbending resistance of Loyalist Spain. But to penalize

these people, who are our kind of people and believe what we believe and want a kind of society we take for granted, seems unheard of. I am again impressed by the unshakeably democratic quality of Loyalist Spain, talking with del Vayo, reading their newspapers, seeing the troops and the officers, watching life as it goes on here. And it goes on. ~~My~~ It goes on in a way to make you very proud of the human animal. Franco will have to do away with about twenty million Spaniards before he could ever rule this country.

Now, for instance, new plans are afoot for children's homes and hospitals, and no one thinks in terms of time, <sup>of war operations</sup> but in terms of the future of Spain. The air raids, lately only on the port, go on, and the siren whines over the city. We were in a movie house Sunday morning seeing the Spanish Earth (remember?) It had been running five minutes when it flickered to a stop. A man's voice announced apologetically: "There's an air raid." There were about a thousand people there, and bombs have fallen all over this city and you'd have to see what they can do ~~xxx~~ within a radius of five blocks to know what destruction is like. But no one in that theatre moved, or panicked. Presently the orchestra appeared and played the national anthem and after that a selection of fine <sup>brassy</sup> romantic music that sounded very funny indeed and everyone chatted and waited and after an hour the electricity went on again and so did the film. This morning at five there was another siren rising and falling and wailing over the city, and then against the night sky the searchlights climbing up and bending back against the clouds, and the tracer bullets from the anti aircraft slowly going up like hot red bars. And the searchlights crawled against the clouds and the <sup>anti-</sup> ~~anti-~~ aircraft pounded over the city and when it was all over, I heard a man walking down the street, singing to himself, and the city was as quiet as a village before dawn.

I do not see how they can lose, unless the democracies allow Hitler and Mussolini to continue sending unlimited supplies. Neither man power nor ability nor determination are lacking: but it is not a fight between Spaniards, it is a fight between one democracy and three Fascisms. And so we sit here and hope to heaven that a sense of justice and a sense of self protection will guide the House and Senate and that the government of Spain will be allowed to buy with good gold those things its armies need to save its people, its land and that droll thing, the faith in a kind of freedom we still call

democracy.

I am writing this by the light of two candles, uncertainty, after a day out at a quiet part of the front. It has been one of the things to do lately, to go about and find one's old friends. To find them so sure, so unchanging, so excellent and humorous and simple and brave, is a good thing to have known in one's life. I find myself foolishly patriotic about the Americans -- about half of the Lincoln-Washington Brigade is lost since this last push-- I find that I love them immeasurably, am immeasurably proud of them, individually and collectively, and proud of their record and proud of the reasons that brought them here and keep them here. I never saw better men in my life in any country, and what they are willing to die for if need be is what you -- in your way and place -- are willing to live for.

You must read a book by a man named Steer: it is called "The Tree of Gernika." It is about the fight of the Basques -- he's the London Times man -- and no better book has come out of the war and he says well all the things I have tried to say to you the times I saw you, after Spain. It is beautifully written and true, and few books are like that, and fewer still that deal with war. Please get it.

My plans are uncertain. I am staying to see what happens next. Things look fine ~~now~~ now, ~~and~~ the Fascists are directing their attack on the other half of Spain so it is very quiet here, for the moment. I have a huge job to do in Cheko-Slovakia, England and France for Collier's, and my daily bread may drive me out for a while but then I'll come back. What goes on here seems to me very much the affair of all of us, who do not want a world whose bible is Mein Kampf. I believe now as much as ever that Spain is fighting our battle, and will not forget that night when we brought the film <sup>to the White House,</sup> and the President said: Spain is a viarious sacrifice for all of us... But I think Spain is maybe not a sacrifice, but a champion: and hope to God that America at least will not go on letting this country down.

And you know something else, this country is far too beautiful for the Fascists to have it. They have already made Germany and Italy and Austria so loathesome that even the scenery is inadequate, and every time I drive on the roads <sup>here</sup> and see the rock mountains and the tough terraced fields, and the umbrella pines above the beaches,

and the dust colored villages and the gravel river beds and the peasant's faces, I think: Save Spain for decent people, it's too beautiful to waste...

This is very hard work, writing in this light, and I've written enough. I only tell you details, and what you think is what I think about this thing, and all along it had made me proud to know that you were always understanding this and always hating (as we all hate more and more) this ruthless invading war. But words are going to do nothing: Fascism has the best technique of words, the daring sustained lie, and it works... Around now, the people of Spain need airplanes.

What a world we live in after all: it seems such a ghastly mess that I place blame very heavily right now on two men, and wish I knew one cannot begin to place blame. It is as horrible and senseless as more history. earthquake and flood, and the faces of the people caught in the disaster -- the old women walking on the roads, with heavy bundles, walking away from their homes, and stretching out their opened hands, wearily and desperately, to all cars, wanting only a ride to go some place else, away, though they do not know where and they do not care -- well, one won't forget these faces, ever.

Don't know when I'll be back in America, have three months work over here at the minimum, and always wanting to see how things go, and why. I wish I could have seen you but I left so fast, after reading the papers, and anyhow you were on the west coast I think. But someday I'll hope to see you and tell you about all this and someday write it. There's a curious similarity between the endurance I saw in the unemployed -- a kind of heroism in peacetime disaster -- and this: and I want to write it. ~~And~~ And this letter is now like a book and enough of it. I send you as always my love and admiration, and please give my respects to Mr. Roosevelt.

Always,

Marty

Barcelona

April 24 or 25